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AUTHOR Moorman, Marta
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ABSTRACT

A study examined features of camps and camp staff that might affect the personal and social benefits of organized camping for children. Questionnaires were completed by 29 camp directors and 270 campers aged 8-14 from 33 residential camps across the United States. Results indicate that higher personal and social outcomes were associated with lower-priced camps, significantly increased social scores were associated with accredited camps and general camps, and the occurrence of unusual incidents was associated with increased personal outcomes. Coed sports had a negative affect on personal and social outcomes. Directors with bachelors degrees showed higher social outcomes in their campers than directors with graduate degrees, and the director's undergraduate and graduate majors both significantly affected personal means of the campers, with majors in recreation and physical education being associated with higher personal outcomes, compared to a degree in education or an unrelated field. Among the campers, girls had significantly higher personal and social outcomes than boys, experienced campers had higher personal outcomes than those who had never attended camp before, and campers surveyed at camp had higher social outcomes than those who were surveyed 6 months after returning home. Suggestions for further research include determining if the negative effect of mixing sexes continues through a wider age span, and whether competition is having negative effects on children. (Contains 24 references.) (TD)

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Factors Affecting the Personal and Social Outcomes of Organized Camping

Marta Moorman

University of Nebraska at Kearny

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Introduction

Summer camp holds a special place in the minds of children. Thoughts of camp bring images of swimming, hiking, laughing and making new friends. According to Dustin (1989), the secret of organized camping is that camp is on a finite, human scale. Anyone can make a difference in their own corner of the world. Another important aspect of camp (Dustin, 1994) is creating a place for children to be children, not "miniature adults" (p.28). Chenery (1984) sees the essential contribution of camp as providing children with a space for spiritual development. Many factors could influence what sort of experiences campers take home with them. The purpose of this study was to examine tangible, physical aspects of camp that might affect the personal and social benefits of organized camping for children. If specific factors could be associated with significantly increased personal or social outcomes, then manipulation of those factors might provide campers with better experiences.

Review of Literature

Much of the previous research into the benefits of organized camping has focused on the self-concept and self-esteem of campers. Self-concept and self-esteem are very similar constructs. Self-concept refers to the things one thinks or knows about oneself, while self-esteem refers to "the extent to which one prizes, values, approves, or likes oneself" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, p. 115). In some of the psychology literature, self-concept and self-esteem are differentiated, while in other discussion they are held to be the same. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, used in much of the camping research, views them as "synonymous" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, p. 137).

Three of four recent studies examining the benefits of camping on the self-concept of campers utilized the Piers-Harris Scale. Myers (1978) studied the association between leadership components and camper development in self-concept, interpersonal affect and environmental attitude, using 100 staff and 122 campers from seven different camps. Significant positive changes in self-concept and environmental attitude were noted. Chenery (1981) investigated the effect of summer camp on child development and contributions of counselors to those effects. A significant increase in self-concept scores was found, although none of the demographic variables of age, grade, payment status or previous camp experience were correlated to this. Cowin (1989) studied factors affecting self-concept and psychological well-being in a camp setting. A significant increase in self-concept was found, with campers crediting the "car-

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ing, sharing environment" (p. 178) and the program, itself, for the greatest number of positive feelings. Krieger (1970) used the Lipsitt Self-Concept Scale for Children and the Bowers' Behavior Rating Scale to examine the effects of organized camping on self-concept change in relation of three variables: age, sex and observable behavior change. He found significant increases in self-esteem and a strong decrease in poorly adjusted behavior in 110 campers at a four week camp, compared to a control group of 70 non-campers. There was no differential effect on self-concept as a result of age or sex.

Fewer studies have been conducted on self-esteem. Dorian (1994) found significant increases in self-esteem in 256 campers at a two week camp. Rubinstein (1977), in a study involving 146 campers, found a significant increase in the self-esteem of campers at a camp that did not offer competitive activities, but not at a camp that did have competitive activities.

Research on factors affecting the outcomes of camp has been somewhat haphazard. Most of the research has been done on camp counselors (Chenery, 1981; Cowin, 1989; and Myers, 1978) with inconclusive results. Factors shown to be significantly associated with increases in self-concept of campers include the caring environment (Cowin, 1989), non-competitive camps (Rubinstein, 1977), and having a choice of activities (Rubinstein, 1977). Factors shown to have no significance in the affective outcomes of camping in previous research include new/returning campers (Chenery, 1981; Cowin, 1989), school grade or age (Chenery, 1981; Cowin, 1989; Krieger, 1970), payment status (Chenery, 1981), and sex of the camper (Krieger, 1970).

In addition to self-concept and self-esteem as outcomes of organized camping, an interesting study by Chenery (1991) compiled a list of statements made by campers, counselors, directors, alumni, and parents concerning the outcomes of camping for children, specifically pertaining to learning about oneself (personal outcomes) and learning about group living and interpersonal skills (social outcomes). Twenty-seven of these statements were utilized in the present study in a questionnaire for campers (see Table 1). Demographic information was also obtained from the campers.

Table 1

Outcome Statements

At camp this summer, I learned:

Personal outcomes	Social outcomes
1. To be independent	1. To make friends
2. To be myself	2. To get along with others
3. To like myself	3. How to act nicer
4. To have confidence in myself	4. To be less shy
5. To challenge myself	5. More about right from wrong
6. To be happier	6. To help others
7. To do without my parents	7. To accept others
8. To appreciate my family	8. To share
9. To be more mature	9. To trust others
10. To have more energy	10. To cooperate with others
11. That I can do most things if I try	11. To control my temper
12. Not to be lazy	12. To be responsible
	13. That its ok to be different
	14. Not to be selfish
	15. To be part of a team

A separate questionnaire for the camp directors provided information in four areas about the camp: general camp descriptors, programming aspects, staff characteristics, and director characteristics (see Table 2).

Methods and Procedures

Using the five different regions of the United States identified by the American Camping Association, a stratified, random sample of camps in the United States operating during the summer of 1996 was selected from two different guides to summer camps. Equal numbers of camps identified as accredited by the American Camping Association, and those that were not accredited, were invited to participate. As well, equal numbers of camps identified as specialty camps (those that spent 60% or more of their time on one particular activity) and general camps (those offering a wide variety of activities, but none of which took 60% or more of the program time) were invited to participate. Camps were delimited to those offering residential programs serving children not specifically designated as disabled. This study limited was by the fact that all the information provided about the camps was self-reported by the camp directors, not observed by a neutral party.

Table 2

Independent Variables

General camp descriptors	Programming aspects
number of campers	division of campers into age groups
camper/counselor ratio	% of time with different ages
cost to attend	service opportunities
length of the session	number of service opportunities
camp setting (urban, rural, wilderness)	choice of activities
Accreditation status	% of time in chosen activities
type of camp (general/specialty)	coed activities
camp goals	% of time in coed activities
unusual incidents	coed sports and games
	coed religious activities
	coed dances
	coed cookouts
Staff characteristics	**Director characteristics**
counselor qualifications	Highest degree obtained
average age of counselors	Undergraduate major
average salary of counselors	Graduate major
length of counselor training	Years experience in the camping field
special instructors employed	Number of certifications held
number of special instructors	
Demographics of campers	
Age	
camping experience	
Race	
Sex	
When surveyed	

From an original sample of 180 camps that was contacted by mail to determine interest, 36 camps indicated they would participate. Ten camper questionnaires and one questionnaire for the director were mailed to those camps, along with a random number table and instructions for randomly choosing 10 campers. Campers completed the questionnaires on the last day of camp. Data were collected from 19 of 36 camps (53%). A second sample of camps was contacted by phone after the summer was over. Fourteen additional camp directors agreed to complete questionnaires and mail surveys to campers who had already returned home. Data were obtained from 10 of the 14 new camps (71%). Twenty-nine camp directors and 270 campers, ages 8-14, completed questionnaires in the post-test study.

Campers completed a questionnaire with 27 personal and social state-

ments taken from Chenery's (1991) findings (see Table 1). A five-point Likert scale was employed, with responses ranging from 'Very True" to "Not at All True." The reliability of this questionnaire was tested using a variation of the Cronbach's Alpha Test of Reliability. The Alpha score for the 27 items on the campers questionnaire was .93.

Camp directors completed a questionnaire about four different aspects of camp, each aspect containing several variables (see Table 2), which became the independent variables for the study. Using mean personal and social outcome scores as dependent variables, the different aspects of the camps were examined for significant relationships using multiple regression, one way analysis of variance and *t*-test for independent samples. The SPSS statistical software package for personal computer was utilized for analysis of data.

Results

General Camp Descriptors

Four variables were found to be associated with significant differences in outcomes. The cost of attending camp was found to have a negative relationship with both personal and social outcomes (see Table 3). Higher personal and social outcomes were associated with lower priced camps. This does not mean that high priced camps are of lesser quality. The cost of a camp could be an indicator of many things. A low priced camp does not exclude many people, which a high priced camp might do. Children who attend a high priced camp may have many types of opportunities and experiences, camp being only one of many. For children of lower income families, camp may be the most exciting, wonderful experience they have ever had. Another possibility is that children who attended higher priced camps were better adjusted, personally and socially, before they came to camp. Campers may have looked on those outcomes as elements they already knew, not things they learned at camp.

Significantly increased social scores were associated with accredited camps (see Table 4). The American Camping Association has long been concerned with children and the camping experience. Their accreditation process goes beyond basic health codes and food service laws, and scrutinizes management, personnel, and programming issues as they relate specifically to the camping milieu (American Camping Association, 1996). These results may indicate that attention to the concerns specific to the camping profession may be

Table 3

Summary of Regression on Cost to Attend

Factor	Description	Outcomes	B	SE B	Beta
Cost to attend	$0-91.50/day	Personal outcomes	-.0037	.0019	-.1227
		Social outcomes	-.0047	.0020	-.1451*

*Significant at $p<.05$

Table 4

t-Test Results of Significant Camp Factors

			Personal outcomes		Social outcomes	
Category	Factor	*n*=	Mean score	*t* value	Mean score	*t* value
General camp Descriptors	Accredited camp	236	4.13	1.79	4.16	2.62*
	Non-accredited	34	3.90		3.81	
	General camp	187	4.13	1.01	4.19	2.32*
	Specialty camp	83	4.04		3.96	
	Unusual incidents	63	4.26	2.28*	4.26	1.78
	Normal camp	197	4.03		4.07	
Program aspects	Coed sports/games	131	3.95	-3.60	4.00	-2.54*
	No coed sports	139	4.25		4.23	
Director's characteristics	Bachelors degree	143	4.16	1.38	4.22	2.41*
	Graduate degree	124	4.04		4.00	
Demographics	Boys	97	3.95	2.68*	3.92	3.45*
	Girls	163	4.19		4.24	
	Surveyed at camp	112	4.20	1.92	4.26	2.65*
	Surveyed at home	158	4.03		4.02	

*Significant at $p<.05$

paying off in terms of increased social outcomes of camps. However, since only four of the sampled camps were non-accredited, the camper group sizes were skewed. Small group size is a potential source of error.

Significant differences in social outcomes were found between general camps and specialty camps (see Table 4), with the children attending general camps scoring higher. Children may feel more at leisure to explore the social aspects of the environment if they are not having to concentrate on acquiring skills and knowledge emphasized in specialty camps. Previous authors (Chenery, 1994; Dustin, 1994; Edwards, 1987) have reflected on the importance of a camp environment as a place to nurture the inner person, a place to make friends and laugh.

Surprisingly, the occurrence of unusual incidents at camp were associated with increased personal outcomes (see Table 4). It might be expected that good news like a newborn baby (camp director's wife) or a handicapped camper who suddenly walks, as happened in two camps, would be associated with high outcomes. However, even the bad occurrences contributed to higher outcomes - lack of water, lice, and a counselor who got hurt but came back to work. The increased personal outcomes may reflect the inner growth of the campers as they learned to deal with difficult situations. Being able to share difficult circumstances with others helps

build camaraderie that can have long lasting benefits.

Several variables in this group were not significantly associated with increased outcomes: number of campers, camper/counselor ratio, setting, goals, and length of the camp. Although not all camps were accredited by the American Camping Association (ACA), nearly all met ACA guidelines for camper/counselor ratio. Even in the largest camps, the campers were still in groups small enough to receive individual attention. The camp setting question had to be deleted due to misinterpretation by respondents.

Programming Aspect of Camp

One programming variable, coed activities, significantly influenced both personal and social outcomes. When four different types of coed activities were examined, all showed lower personal and social outcomes. However, coed sports and games were the only activities that showed significant differences for personal and social outcomes. For this sample of campers, it would appear that coed sports and games did not improve their personal or social outcomes. It may be that for this age group (8-14 year olds), the growing up process is difficult enough without the added effects of having to deal with the opposite sex and the social pressures that come with that interaction. Since sports and games proved the only significant factor from among the activities tested, perhaps it is the pressure of competition that makes the difference. Rubinstein (1977) found significant increases in self-esteem in campers from non-competitive camps, but no significant increases from campers in competitive camps.

Staff Characteristics

None of the staff characteristics examined by this study significantly affected personal or social outcomes for campers. For the camps and campers in this study, the aspects of counselors that were examined did not affect outcomes: counselors' age differences, salary differences, length of training, number of special instructors hired. Many camp directors swear that counselors are the heart and soul of a camp. If the counselors are important (Cowin, 1989) and the tangible aspects of counselors are not significant, then the difference must lie elsewhere in the intangible aspects of these people, such as personality or compatibility.

Characteristics of the Director

Three variables associated with the director's education were associated with significantly increased outcomes (see Tables 4 and 5). The highest degree obtained was associated with significant differences in social outcomes. Directors with bachelors degrees showed higher social outcomes in their campers than directors with graduate degrees.

Table 5

Results of ANOVA for Significant Camp Factors

Category	Factor	Description	*n* =	Personal mean	*F*
Director's characteristics	Undergraduate major	Unrelated	40	4.05	2.74*
		Related	65	4.19	
		Education	56	3.85	
		PE	37	4.20	
		Recreation	42	4.24	
	Graduate major	Unrelated	12	3.56	2.69*
		Related	34	4.13	
		Education	33	3.94	
		PE	20	4.32	
		Recreation	33	4.09	
Camper demographics	Amount of campers' experience	Never camped	49	3.90	3.19*
		Experienced camper	152	4.18	
		New to this camp	65	4.04	

*Significant at $p<.05$

The director's undergraduate and graduate majors both significantly affected personal means of the campers. Undergraduate degrees in recreation, physical education or related fields were associated with higher personal outcomes, compared to an undergraduate education degree. Similarly, a graduate degree in physical education was associated with higher personal outcomes as compared to a graduate degree in an unrelated field, such as math or music.

The need to always be in control could be a deterrent for a "teacher" type of director from entering into the "fun" of summer camp. Graduate degrees in unrelated fields may cause those directors to focus their attention, hence the emphasis of the camp, on other areas besides personal and social development. Here again, low numbers within the groups could lead to erroneous conclusions about the data.

Demographics of the Campers

Three demographic variables had significant influence on outcomes (see Tables 4 and 5). In this sample of campers, girls were shown to have significantly higher personal and social outcomes than boys. It might be that girls were more willing to respond to these types of questions. Experienced campers were found to have higher personal outcomes than those who had never attended camp before. It would seem that being familiar with the surroundings and the routine of a camp made a significant difference to young campers. Finally, campers who were surveyed at camp had significantly higher social outcomes than those who were surveyed up to 6 months

after they had returned home. This would seem to indicate that the social effects of camp wear off in time.

Suggestions for Continued Research

This study suggests a few avenues for continued research. The effect of coed activities on outcomes needs to be pursued. It would be interesting to determine if the negative effect of mixing sexes continues, and if it continues through a wider age span. Another topic would be a study of personal and social outcomes at camps that offer competitive activities and those that do not emphasize those activities. Our society places so much emphasis on competition, it would be valuable to determine if competition is having negative effects on children.

Conclusion

This study examined physical, tangible factors of camps that might be manipulated by camp directors to provide higher personal and social outcomes for their campers. Several factors were shown to be associated with increased outcomes for campers. Camp directors and parents should be aware of elements that could help children get more out of camp.

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Marta Moorman, Department of Physical Education, University of Nebraska at Kearny, 905 West 25th Street, NE, 68840. E-mail: moorman@unk.edu